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DEADLY SHOOTING: Police detective who shot, killed man ID'd

Man made a 'furtive movement,' LV authorities say

By LAWRENCE MOWER
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Sequoia Pearce had to kneel before Las Vegas police officers who held her at gunpoint in her bedroom Friday night.

The 20-year-old, who is nine months pregnant, did not know what was happening in the darkened room. She could see the bathroom and her fiancé, who was reflected in the mirror.

He too was being held at gunpoint as officers told him to get on the floor. He met her gaze in the mirror and saw her kneel. She watched him put his hands up.

"All right, all right," he said to police, Pearce recounted Monday.

She heard a gunshot and screamed. The man she was to marry slid and fell to the floor, blood pouring from a gunshot wound to his face.

She saw him breathing before officers rushed her out of the apartment. Trevon Cole, 21, died minutes later.

Pearce, who is scheduled to give birth today to a daughter, KaLynn Cole, will raise her baby alone.

"I just feel like they stole everything from me," Pearce said. "They stole it all."

Officers were serving a drug warrant on the apartment at 2850 E. Bonanza Road, near Eastern Avenue, Friday night.

The warrant was based on marijuana that undercover police had bought from Cole three times, said Deputy Chief Joseph Lombardo, who oversees the Metropolitan Police Department's narcotics section.

What happened when officers served the warrant is under dispute. Police said an officer fired after Cole made a "furtive movement" toward the officer. Pearce contends that Cole made no movements toward officers, did not have anything in his hands and did not own a weapon.

The search warrant, which listed the items that were taken by investigators, did not list a weapon. It did list an unspecified amount of marijuana and digital scales.

Pearce said that about 9 p.m. Friday, she heard knocking on her apartment door. The knocking grew louder, but Pearce didn't answer, believing it was her mother, who she believed was angry

with her.

"I thought, 'Oh my God, I don't want to do this tonight,'" she said.

When police forced their way into the one-bedroom apartment, she said, they found her in the closet and Cole in the bathroom. Both doors were open. The lights were off in the bedroom, but illumination from a 42-inch television was bright enough that she could see what was happening after she was ordered out of the closet

After the shot was fired, everyone in the apartment froze, even the officer who had pulled the trigger, she said.

After police whisked her from the apartment, she kept asking officers whether her fiancé was dead. They wouldn't answer her, she said.

Cole's family described the 21-year-old man as a gregarious, smiling gentle giant. At more than 6 feet tall and 285 pounds, he was built like a linebacker. That's the position he played for a year at Moorpark College in Southern California.

"Trevon was a very beautiful and loving person," said his mother, 37-year-old Nichelle Bratton. "He could walk into a room of silence and just light the whole room up."

Others also said Cole was a genuinely good person.

"I have three boys, and I would be proud to have him as my child," said friend Michelle Rouet, 41.

Cole and Pearce moved from California to Las Vegas last year so he could have a shot at joining the football team at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. News of Pearce's pregnancy, and being informed that not enough of his Moorpark College credits transferred to UNLV, delayed his plans, his family said.

He was excited about the imminent birth of his daughter, and during the two weeks before his death when Pearce was on break from cosmetology school, he wouldn't leave the house.

Cole's family and their lawyer, Andre Lagomarsino, said Cole had no criminal record.

The officer who shot Cole has been identified as 34-year-old Bryan Yant, a 10-year veteran of the department who has been involved in other shootings.

He has been placed on routine paid administrative leave pending the outcome of a Clark County coroner's inquest and a department use-of-force review board investigation.

Friday's fatal shooting was the third time that Yant has fired his weapon and struck someone.

During a 2002 inquest into his fatal shooting of a robbery suspect, Yant's statements contradicted evidence.

Yant said he was chasing Richard Travis Brown, dubbed "The Candy Bar Robber" by police for his 41 heists, in the early morning of Nov. 17, 2001.

After a vehicle pursuit, Yant chased Brown on foot. Yant told the inquest jury that Brown reached for a gun as the two ran down a sidewalk. Yant fired three to four rounds. Brown fell, face first.

The officer continued to yell commands at Brown, who was on the ground, to drop his gun. Yant

said Brown then tried to re-aim the gun at him. Yant fired another three to four rounds, killing Brown.

But crime scene analysts recovered Brown's handgun on the sidewalk, 35 feet away from where he had been shot.

How the gun wound up 35 feet away from Brown was never explored during the inquest. The jury took half an hour to find the shooting justified.

Yant was involved in a Dec. 5, 2003, shooting in Country Club Hills, a Summerlin subdivision.

He was investigating a prowler in the neighborhood before dawn. The prowler had been paid to kill a Rottweiler that had mauled a small neighborhood dog.

When Yant spotted the prowler, identified as Melvin Gilchrist, police said the man charged Yant and threw a butcher knife and an aluminum baseball bat at him. Police said Yant could not see the bat clearly and mistook it for a shotgun.

But in an interview with the Review-Journal in 2004, Gilchrist said he never threatened the officer. He said he dropped the bat and knife before Yant opened fire. When Yant started firing, Gilchrist said he ran away. He said Yant continued to fire as he fled.

Gilchrist was shot in the hip and survived. He later pleaded guilty to resisting an officer with a deadly weapon.

Because Gilchrist survived, an inquest was never held. But the department's use-of-force board exonerated Yant.

Allen Lichtenstein, general counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada, was not familiar with Friday night's incident and could not speak to it.

But, he said, "I think when you have that many officer-involved shootings it raises questions. It does not provide answers."

He urged police to conduct a "fair, transparent" process to determine whether the shooting was justified. A coroner's inquest is neither fair nor transparent, he said.

"It is a process that has no credibility in our view," Lichtenstein said. "It is the sound of one hand clapping. It really is a whitewash system."

The shooting has left Cole's family reeling. They had been preparing for a birth, not a death.

"We were mentally prepped to know in June we were coming to Vegas to see the baby, to be here for the birth of the baby," said Cole's aunt, Kimeryn Williams. "Not for this."

Review-Journal reporter Mike Blasky contributed to this report. Contact reporter Lawrence Mower at lmower@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0440.

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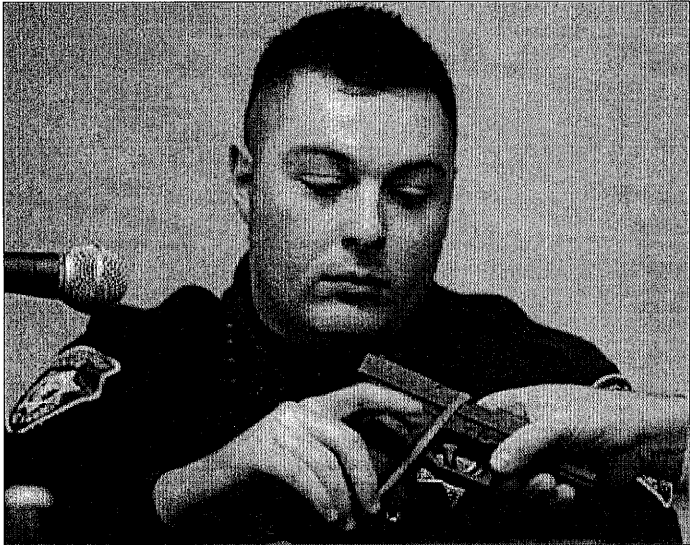
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By LAWRENCE MOWER



While testifying at a 2002 coroner's inquest, Las Vegas police officer Bryan Yant is given the gun he used in the fatal shooting of robbery suspect Richard Travis Brown. (Las Vegas Review-Journal File)

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gunpoint in her bedroom Friday night.

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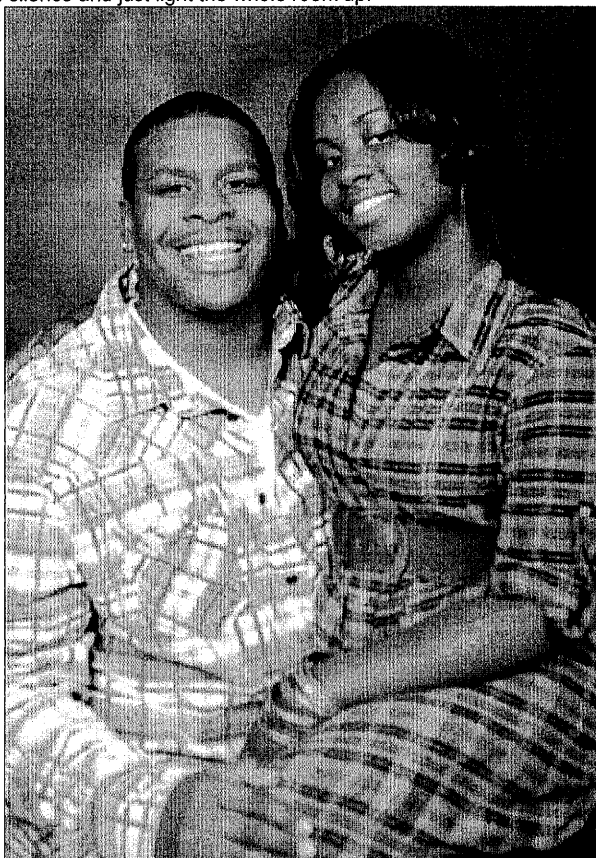
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